1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
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CHAPTER V

PRIMARY ADAPTATIONS AND TECHNOLOGY

THE GENERAL PROBLEM

The economic life of a people is essentially concerned with relating the primary technological adaptation to nature and the community's secondary adaptation which is its social organization. Many peoples have developed a separate set of unified social mechanisms which are roughly called their economic systems, such as the organized market of modern capitalism or the simpler and less developed systems of agricultural barbarism. The tools and implements are formed into a general order of making and using to exact a supply of food and other creature necessities from nature, and they are then used by the population of a group in a systematized manner through a set of conventions and social usages which are dictated by the social organization. The social organization regulates the technology and helps discipline the distribution and consumption of its productivity.

The Murngin have not created a separate economic structure and are dependent on their other social institutions to regulate indirectly their technology and control the distribution and the consumption of goods and services.[1] The present chapter will be concerned with the purely economic aspects of the social structure, and with artifacts and their manufacture and use.

I. The Place of the Murngin Social Structure in Organizing Production of Creature Necessities

1. *The Horde*

The horde is an unstable economic group whose membership and size are regulated by the seasonal cycle. In the rainy months this group may be, and frequently is, only a kinship group composed of a few brothers and their wives and children or possibly "brothers-in-law" and their families. (These relatives are usually connected by blood.) When the dry season begins and the various food-producing areas are

[1] The economic horde organization is only partly an exception to this.

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
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open to human occupation by the drying of the land, the burning of the spear grass, and the disappearance of the swarms of vicious insects, these smaller groups coalesce into larger units which may contain as many as thirty or forty people and will contain many more if a large ritual is being celebrated. Every member of this group is related closely to at least one or more other individuals in the group, but to the rest he is only tribally related. Where the sea-turtle eggs on the sand beaches are most plentiful, the oyster beds most prolific and accessible, sea-bird eggs most abundant, lily and yam swamps most productive, and the cycad palm nuts ripened and ready for picking, there will be found the horde groups.

All of the people in the horde will be of friendly clans which are usually closely intermarried; if there are antagonisms they are suppressed or given expression in a peace-making makarata, which allows those involved to remain in harmony. As soon as food is plentiful the better areas usually become locations for the great rituals which take place at this time; the ceremonial life definitely enlarges the size of the horde groups. The camp of the horde is organized spatially in the same way as the clan lands are spatially related to each other.

Ritual sanctions at this time help prevent open strife, which is always a possibility whenever the clans come together. The belief that the totem will be offended if clashes occur between opposing clansmen usually keeps the peace. Ritual sanction, then, is the most powerful force in regulating the peaceful behavior of these larger food-gathering hordes. If it were not for these extreme sanctions the larger hordes could not be formed. Peoples with a background of feud and warfare who might not otherwise risk meeting one another can be fairly certain of peace in a horde gathered for a ritual. Since the local clans which start the ceremony have it well under way and the totemic emblems have been made and are in the camp by the time the first guests arrive, hesitant visitors can feel comparatively safe in coming to the ceremony. The bitterly antagonistic clans, however, who have a continuous blood feud tradition and a record of killing back of them would never be present unless under extreme circumstances; for religious sanctions or peace-making duels would not prevent open strife and possible secret killings between them.

The horde, then, is governed by the seasonal fluctuation of plenty or scarcity, and its extreme in size is effected by the attractive stimuli of important ceremonies.

The usual division of labor obtains during the period of the larger

616 parts of Australia, is absent. Instead, groups of clans, always
[619] of the same moiety,[7] are aggregated more or less closely according to the intensity of the relationship, gauged by the extent of the totemic inheritance from the ancestral culture heroes, which they possess in common.

To these aggregations of clans, the term *mălla*[8] is applied. The important factor in social organisation is the "dual division"—the division into two opposing groups. As stated above, certain clans within the same moiety are aggregated more or less closely into groups according to the in-

616 [7] An organisation known as the "dual division" occurs throughout Australia and in many parts of the Pacific. It transcends tribal boundaries and cuts through the whole of the social organisation, dividing the clans into two exogamous groups called "moieties".

In Arnhem Land, and in many other parts of Australia, the dual organisation divides all totems between the two moieties. The moieties generally, but not invariably, bear names. In Eastern Arnhem Land these names are *dua* and *yiritja*. There is a well-marked social "opposition" between moieties and the people often have the belief (which can have no sound foundation biologically, since members of the two moieties must intermarry) that members of the two moieties can be distinguished by physical differences, such as skin or eye colour, or the character of the hair, which in one moiety is said to be straight and in the other curly.

●[571] [8] *Mălla* is not capable of an exact or scientific definition and may mean nothing more than "a group". It is applied loosely to any group, whether of people or of clans, according to context, but in the sense mentioned here, has a more specific meaning—a group of clans linked by totemism. These groups are not to be regarded in any sense as tribes, but are bound together solely by totemic affinity. They may include within the scope of their solidarity, clans which possess much less cultural and linguistic affinity than those in the opposite moiety. In the absence of tribal organisation in North-eastern Arnhem Land, the opposition between moieties and hence the solidarity of clans within the *mălla*, tends to be emphasised.

horde rests on no such solid foundation and is unstable. 614 621

Membership of each group within this complex segmentary organisation carries its own (often conflicting) solidarity and obligations, which however, form an integral scheme. Obligation and counter-obligation, defined by membership of the clan, and especially by kinship, supplies the incentive to work, to produce wealth and *gerri*, (page 5). Kinship also provides the chief basis for the division of the proceeds of communal enterprise. 602

Before discussing the economic structure in detail, it is necessary to look at the environment, the background, in which the aborigine lives. We must examine the natural resources which are available to him both for the gathering of food and for the manufacture of weapons, implements and utensils, as well as for the building of houses and watercraft. It is necessary to study the methods he has developed for the exploitation of these resources, for the collecting of raw material, for the manufacture of food and the utensils necessary in his domestic economy and activities. It is necessary, also, to examine any mechanisms which he may have developed for the distribution of these goods between individuals within a group, or between groups, and again, in a wider field, to trace the beginning of any system of barter or trade in manufactured objects or commodities, with groups in distant areas. 121

Does such exchange or trade exist? Is it a regular, (organised) matter or merely casual and sporadic? How is it carried out, and what is the motive force, the incentive, which is required to overcome the difficulties inherent in the "segmentary organisation" which would tend to prevent any extensive form of intercourse between widely separated groups? We have seen already that the segmentary organisation, which divides the people into small groups, each with an intense internal solidarity, also furnishes a basis for 571 619

9: Thomson E-5 (1935-1943) 1949
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571opposition between groups, which, in the absence of some
619 powerful motive or urge, must tend to restrict communication between people who are situated at any distance from one another.

133 Let us consider, first, the country and its natural resources. Arnhem Land is a vast territory, still in its virgin state. The terrain is rugged. There are no high mountains but only low hills, which, except on the western fringe, rarely exceed four or five hundred feet in height. These hills, which often outcrop with bare rock, give an arid, even desolate, appearance to the country. Undulating lowlands and broad plains
[137] stretch for hundreds of miles. These are more fertile, and are covered either with a dense growth of long grass or with savannah woodland. They are intersected by numerous watercourses, which in the dry season become mere dry ravines with a few deep waterholes. In the wet season these river courses are raging torrents.

813 The natives are familiar with the various botanical (eco-
824 logical) associations which characterise this territory, and distinguish these by special terms. They can name, without hesitation, the characteristic trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants in every association, as well as the food plants and animals, and the raw materials used in technology, which at any season of the year[12] they obtain from each of these associations. In this we see a system and an orderliness

[12] Some idea of the critical knowledge of their territory and its resources which the Australian aborigines possess, and of the systematic way in which they classify these resources, as well as their appreciation of the influence of the seasonal cycle on their life and economy, may be gathered from the following accounts of the people of the neighbouring territory of Cape York Peninsula: *Names and Naming in the Wik Monkan Tribe* (in press) and *The Seasonal Factor in Human Culture*, Proc. Prehist. Soc. July-Dec, 1939, No. 10, pp. 209-221.

15:Chaseling M-5 (ca. 1934-1936)1957
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region can note. It is for this reason that Mr Chaseling's book will be read by others besides the general reader.

In the rest of this Introduction, I draw attention to a few of the significant facts in the life of the north-east Arnhem Aborigines, and also to some of the important points made by Mr Chaseling.

Aboriginal Relationship System and Intelligence

North-east Arnhem Land is a very interesting region from the anthropological point of view. As elsewhere in Australia, the basis of social behaviour is the kinship or relationship system. According to this everyone is related to everyone else. This relationship, however, is not expressed in a multiplicity of terms which express the exact relationship between any two individuals. Instead, only about two dozen terms are used, with the result that all one's relations, that is, everyone in the region, are divided up into twenty odd groups or classes of relations. Thus, in one class the Aboriginal includes his own mother and her sisters and also a number of other women, mostly her cousins, and to all these people he applies one term, the term which includes and means 'mother'; the term 'sister' includes not only the daughters of his father's brothers and of his mother's sisters (these are sometimes referred to by students as parallel cousins), but also the daughters of certain of his parents' cousins; and so on with the other terms. This is the classificatory (or classifying) form of kinship system. It does not mean that an Aboriginal does not know his own mother, or father, or son, or father's father, and so on; he does know them—indeed, he is very good at genealogies. Its importance is that the terms used by two people of one another indicate the kind of behaviour they adopt toward each other—whether, for example, they can sit near one another, speak to one another, see or marry one another, and what is the obligation with regard to gifts and mourning with